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Meaningful work and artistic interventions in organizations: conceptual development and empirical exploration

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Meaningful work and artistic interventions in organizations: Conceptual development and empirical exploration

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Meaningful work and artistic interventions in organizations: Conceptual development and empirical exploration

Abstract:
This article explores whether artistic interventions in organizations offer employees the possibility of fulfilling the human need to give meaning to work. It draws on several distinct bodies of theories relating to the non-instrumental management of work to identify dimensions of meaningful work, and builds on previous empirical research to specify analytical categories. The qualitative data consists of responses from 67 employees who experienced artistic interventions. The analysis shows that artistic interventions can enable employees to experience meaningful work. It enriches theory-building by offering an expanded integrated framework to conceptualize meaningful work with several categories that had not yet been identified in the literature. The implications for management in taking the learning forward in the organization are discussed, and suggestions for future research to address the study's limitations are identified.

Keywords: meaningful work, artistic interventions, personal development, non-instrumental management, good work.

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1. Introduction

The human need to experience work as meaningful is not new (Maslow, 1964), but the question of how to fulfil that need arises anew in every generation. Scholars observing social trends note that "people are more interested than ever in having the time they spend working matter" (Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2012, p. 322). However, at the same time that people aspire to finding "good work" which allows them to "live up to the demands of our job and the expectations of society without denying the needs of our personal identities" (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001, p. ix), their workplaces are subject to mounting pressures from global and local competitiveness and from organizational procedures such as the multiplication of indicators and assessments, time constraints, and meetings.

So is it due to fortuitous serendipity or to managerial Machiavellianism that the past decade has seen a remarkable growth in attention to the arts in business in many countries (Darsø, 2004, 2016; Schiuma, 2011)? Our research curiosity is piqued by this puzzling phenomenon, leading us to ask: *Might bringing the arts into organizations help create conditions for experiencing meaningful work?* It is an important question to ask at a time when managers, with the help of consultants and sometimes also academics, are seeking ever more tools for exerting pressure on employees, seducing them to give their all, passionately, to the employer (Schiuma & Carlucci, 2016). We postulate that the answer might depend largely on the capacity of management to conceive of new, non-instrumental ways of managing people and work, rooted in the Kantian categorical imperative that "one should always treat the humanity in a person as an end and never as a means merely" (Bowie, 1998: 1083). The literature relating to meaningful

work has not yet examined how the organization can contribute to the process whereby individuals find meaning in their work. Scholars tend to treat this as an individual responsibility, rather than a managerial task (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Michaelson, 2005; Michaelson, Pratt, Grant & Dunn, 2014; Michaelson, 2015). They warn of the danger of instrumentalizing meaningful work, yet the solution cannot lie in a complete absence of orientation at the workplace.

This article addresses the dilemma that results from this double-edged danger by developing a conceptual framework that draws together hitherto unrelated bodies of literature relating to meaningful work and artistic interventions in organizations. We use it to explore empirical data from thirty three artistic interventions in Spain to see (a) whether there is evidence that these activities have the potential for contributing to an experience of meaningful work, and if so (b) which dimensions of meaningful work they can influence.

Five sections follow this introduction. The first section constructs our theoretical framework by connecting elements from three distinct strands of literature that we consider relevant for conceptualizing and specifying key dimensions of meaningful work. We then discuss the literature on artistic interventions and relate it to the theoretical framework on meaningful work. The second section describes our research method and data base. In the third section we present the results of our analysis, showing the frequency with which certain dimensions of meaningful work appear and illustrating them with respondents' formulations. In the fourth section we show how our findings both document the relevance of the existing categories and also enrich them with additional elements not yet included in the debate of meaningful work. In the fifth section, we conclude by discussing the implications for theory building about meaningful work and artistic interventions, identifying the limitations of our study that future

research should address, and suggesting possible implications for a non-instrumental approach to management and meaningful work.

2. Theoretical framework

To address our research question, we offer a framework for understanding meaningful work that draws together several bodies of literature, namely strands of thought and empirical research relating to non-instrumental management. We then connect the framework to insights from recent studies on artistic interventions.

2.1. Conceptualizing meaningful work

Although there is no consensus on a definition of meaningful work, it is generally conceived as an outcome of alignment between an individual's aspirations and their perceived realization, in other words a match between the features valued at work and the features present at the workplace (Frankl, 1969; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003: 313). The subjective dimension (employee's perceptions) of meaningful work is complemented by "an 'objective' dimension (working conditions)" and "these dimensions mutually influence each other" (Michaelson, Pratt, Grant & Dunn, 2014: 85). However, there is a growing tension between the objective and subjective dimensions of meaningful work. The objective conditions have become increasingly demanding while at the same time, people increasingly expect work to provide more opportunities for self-realization (Michaelson, 2005).

To develop our understanding of meaningful work, we draw from literature on gratuitous gift theory, spirituality at work, and meaningful work. Common to these approaches is the attention they draw to three kinds of needs: 1) personal development, 2) relationships with others, and 3) benefit for society. After linking these heretofore usually separate bodies of literature that

relate to meaningful work we present findings from one of the most comprehensive empirical studies in this area as a basis for specifying sub-categories with which to analyze our own data.

Maslow's (1964) hierarchy of needs starts with physiological needs and moves up to the need for meaning and self-realization (intellectual, emotional and spiritual). He identifies the search for meaning as a human need. Work, when defined broadly as a purposeful activity, can respond to this human need for meaning (Frankl, 1969; Brief & Nord, 1990). Meaningful work goes beyond meeting a human need (Grant, 2007; Yeoman, 2014). It also refers both to the employee's ideals and to job characteristics (Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2012). Some definitions highlight the employee's experience in conjunction with ideals or norms. In this vein, meaningful work is conceived as "the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards" (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004:14; May, Li, Mencl & Huang, 2014). Other definitions relate the expected with the perceived characteristics of work. Meaningful work is then the result of a match between the aspirations and objectives that an individual hopes to realize at work (features desired at work) and the perception the individual has of the extent those objectives are realized in the real work context (features actually present at work) (Frankl, 1969; Ros, Schwartz & Surkiss, 1999; Isaksen, 2000; Morin, 2008).

Giving meaning to work is a deep source of intrinsic motivation (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Michaelson, 2005). Meaning-making is an expression of human liberty: management cannot impose meaningful work; it is something that only each individual can choose to pursue for him- or herself. It would even be counterproductive to impinge upon each individual's freedom to give meaning to his or her work (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002; Bowie, 1998). As Bowie points out, "meaningful work is not paternalistic in the sense of interfering with the worker's conception of how she wishes to obtain happiness" (1998: 1083). Instead, it is more

fruitful to reflect on the conditions required at work for it to meet the human need for meaning. A step in this direction is to identify the dimensions of work that people usually find meaningful.

Undertaking to analyse dimensions of meaningful work implies rejecting the hegemonic approach which positions work only as a means for obtaining a result and conceives of instrumentality as the primary reference point in corporate life (Frémeaux & Michelson, 2011). Work cannot be treated in an exclusively instrumental way; it is not just a means of meeting material expectations (salary, job security). Two other dimensions are essential: the social dimension of human relations at work and the symbolic dimension of personal development, self-realization, and self-expression through work. The social and symbolic dimensions are often called intrinsic as opposed to the extrinsic or materialist orientations (Maslow, 1964). The possibility of pursuing a non-instrumental relation to work is present in three bodies of literature: the existential gift, spirituality at work, and meaningful work. We present each of these briefly to show how they share common dimensions of meaning given to work.

(1) The logic of the gift that Mauss (1923) developed from his studies of archaic societies has a non-instrumental underpinning because it specifies the taboo of expecting a counter-gift (Caillé & Godbout, 1992; Caillé, 2001; Godbout, 2000). However, the management literature, particularly in human resource management and marketing, has generally presented the logic of the gift and counter-gift in an instrumental manner by emphasizing the existence of a calculation (Sherry, 1983; Falk, 2007; Balkin & Richebé, 2007; Dodlova & Yudkevich, 2009). While the theory is helpful in explaining frustrated expectations of employees when employment conditions change, it does not suffice to explain the experience of meaningful work. Other management scholars have therefore supplemented the theory by introducing the notion of the gratuitous or existential gift in organizations (Frémeaux & Michelson, 2011). This

concept makes it possible to recognize the human need to give. Although reciprocity may often occur, it is not the primary objective of the act of freely giving. The concept of the existential gift offers four dimensions relating to meaningful work: personal development (the gift as expression and source of liberty), relation to others (the gift as a source of relationship), service to others (the gift as a response to needs), and a humanistic vision (the human being as an end rather than as a means to an end).

(2) Another body of literature that contains relevant elements for understanding features of meaningful work relates to spirituality at work (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Mitroff & Denton, 1999). Recent comprehensive studies (Lips-Wiersma, 2002, 2003; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009) highlight four sources of meaningful work: developing and becoming self, expressing self, unity with others and serving others. Developing, becoming and expressing self imply a moral development, a personal growth, the ability to stay true to oneself, and to create, achieve and influence. Unity with others relates to sharing values, belonging, and working together. Serving others means the ability to contribute to them and the ability to see a connection between work and a transcendent cause which meets the needs of humanity (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009:501).

(3) Psychological literature on meaningful work also offers insights into the different ways that individuals can discover (Frankl, 1969) and give meaning to their work (Brief & Nord, 1990). Scholars in this area (Fox, 1980; Ros, Schwartz & Surkiss, 1999; Morin, 2008) and specifically Isaksen (2000) identify three similar entry points: the sense of autonomy and liberty in accomplishing one's work; the possibility of having good relationships with others and to attend to their wellbeing; and the sense that the work benefits others and society.

In summary, these three, usually distinct, bodies of literature identify similar features of work that can be treated as three meta-dimensions:

(1) personal development;

(2) relationships and service to others;

(3) benefit for society.

The next step in building our analytical framework is to add empirically-based subcategories to each of the three meta-dimensions. Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) and Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) point out that the criteria of meaningful work remain vague, so they are difficult to apply in organizational research. We therefore draw on one of the most comprehensive empirical studies of meaningful work (Morin, 2008) to help specify concepts for the analysis of our own data.

2.2. Empirically-based specification of meaningful work

Morin (2008) conducted a multi-year research program (2002-2007) to identify the sources of meaning at work that affect mental health in the workplace and organizational engagement. From her analysis of 75 semi-directed interviews with managers in Montreal and Paris she derived a set of characteristics of meaningful work. Afterwards, Morin undertook a large-scale study encompassing four organizations in Canada: first in a hospital (262 responses), then – with revised research instruments – in a health and social services center (955 responses), an agricultural research center (101 responses), and an engineering consulting company (305 responses) (pp. 24-25). Using surveys (paper-based in the hospital and Web-based in the other three organizations p. 21) with a wide battery of items from several existing scales (pp. 22-24),

the study tested a series of hypotheses and found that six characteristics of work are positively and significantly correlated to meaningful work (p. 31). They are (pp. 22-23, 25):

(1) Moral correctness: work performed in a workplace that values justice and equity, respects human dignity;

(2) Learning and development opportunities: work that people enjoy doing, permits them to achieve their objectives, develop their competences and talents, and realize their aspirations and ambitions;

(3) Autonomy: work that allows people to assume responsibilities, exercise judgment to solve problems, and take initiatives in order to improve results;

(4) Positive relationships: work that enables interesting and good relationships;

(5) Social purpose: work that is useful to society, to other people;

(6) Recognition: work that corresponds to people's skills and in which competences and results are recognized (including satisfactory salary and outlook for promotion).

Morin's analysis indicates that the three most important elements for meaningful work among the 1623 respondents to the surveys were social purpose, learning and development opportunities, and autonomy (Morin, 2008, pp. 31-32; 39).

2.3. An integrated framework for the dimensions of meaningful work

Drawing together the elements from the three bodies of literature and the empirical studies in Canada, we identify the following categories for examination in our study (see Table 1). The three meta-dimensions of meaningful work that we derived from the various strands of literature are in the left hand column. The six characteristics confirmed by Morin's multi-case study fit in well with these three meta-dimensions of meaningful work and are presented in the second and third columns of the table. We use our empirical data on artistic interventions in organizations to

analyze how each of these dimensions of meaningful work is experienced in this particular kind of situation, as well as what they reveal about the impacts of such interventions (see section 4).

[Insert Table 1]

2.4. Conceptualizing artistic interventions in organizations

We define artistic interventions as processes that bring "people, products, and practices from the world of the arts into organizations" (Berthoin Antal, 2014: 177). Other terms for these activities are workarts (Barry & Meisiek, 2010) or arts-based-initiatives, abbreviated as ABIs (Schiuma, 2011). Artistic interventions can last for hours, days, or months and are used to address various kinds of issues in organizations. For example, they can be focused on developing skills (e.g., leadership, communication), improving working relations within and between units, or generating ideas for new services, products or processes. Artistic interventions can involve all art forms and the artists are free to choose the approach they want to take in the process. For examples from dance see Bozic Yams (2016); for creative writing see Jahnke (2016) and Styhre & Fröberg (2016); and for theater see Brattström (2016) and Teichmann (2001). Such interventions in non-arts-based organizations are inherently countercultural because artistic ways of working do not adhere to the logics of rationality and instrumentality that dominate mainstream management theories, and that are based on a reductionist understanding of work. The need for infusing organizations with such countercultural impulses is being recognized in the business community: for example, the business weekly the *Economist* (2011) told its readers around the world that "business has a lot to learn from the arts."

Artists and managers have been experimenting with artistic interventions for over thirty years. Although artworks may indeed result from such interventions, this is not their primary objective. The intention is usually to address an issue in the organization with art-based practices

that encourage participants to challenge and reflect on the engrained ways of seeing and doing things in their organizations, and to try out new approaches. The most frequently cited initial projects were launched by the Artists Placement Group (APG) in the UK during the 1970s (Steveni, 2001) and Xerox PARC in the United States (Harris, 1999), but the growth of the field in Western European countries in particular occurred since the turn of the millennium. Not surprisingly for a new field, initial publications were largely anecdotal and generally positive because they first came from the artists or the project managers in the organizations (e.g., Zander & Zander, 2000; Buswick, Creamer & Pinard, 2004). Then researchers started documenting the opportunities that such experiments offered for innovation and change in organizations (Barry & Meisiek, 2004; Darsø, 2004; Styhre & Eriksson, 2008).

Given the diversity of artistic interventions, several attempts have been made to build typologies. Darsø (2004: 41) offered the first typology of artistic interventions, differentiating between those focused on learning from artistic metaphors, artistic capabilities, artistic products, or artistic events. She revised her schema to show different approaches to artful creation, focusing on developing: artful capabilities and competences, conceptualizing and prototyping, social innovation and product innovation, or collabs and practice spheres (Darsø, 2004: 141). Schiuma differentiates several "managerial forms of ABIs": arts-based interventions, arts-based projects, arts-based programmes, (2011: 48-49) which can take many different formats, including training, coaching, residencies, art collections and sponsorship (2011: 51-52). Barry and Meisiek propose a typology of "workarts", namely art collection, artist-led intervention, and artistic experimentation (2010: 1507), which corresponds to the threefold characterization in our definition of artistic interventions, namely processes bringing *people, practices, and products* from the world of the arts into the world of organizations. In practice, the typological differentiations from the literature are blurred and activities often combine two or three of these

elements. It is worth noting that all these definitions and typologies include the possibility of artistic interventions that do not directly involve artists, but most of the research attention so far has been directed at interventions with artists. Important distinguishing features are the degree of participation of the employees and the inclusion of reflection on experience (Berthoin Antal, 2014).

Most artistic interventions involve an intermediary person or organization who bridges between the world of the arts and the world of organizations. Some of these have a methodology to structure the overall process within which the artists and members of the organization design their own way forward (Berthoin Antal, 2012). For example, the Swedish intermediary TILLT starts its 9-month long artistic intervention with a period of artistic research during which the artist explores the organization and its members, then the artist meets once a week with a mixed group of employees to develop ideas over several months, followed by a period of implementation. The phases are punctuated by meetings with the intermediary and workshops to exchange experiences with other organizations (Johansson Sköldberg & Woodilla, 2016).

Example of an artistic intervention

> Although the uniqueness of each artistic intervention makes it impossible to describe a typical one, an example we studied can illustrate the idea. It was produced by a Spanish intermediary, Conexiones improbables, which uses a similar methodology to TILLT's but in a much more compact form for artistic interventions that last just three months. An organization providing employment for people with disabilities faced an existential challenge: it had to find ways to increase its revenues by 50 to 75 percent because of cutbacks in government subsidies. The management wanted to know whether it needed to transform the organization from a foundation to a company, and it wanted to

identify additional streams of income. The artist encouraged the management to expand the group of participants in the artistic intervention to include more members with disabilities. Then, in two sessions he facilitated various exercises and games that helped reveal undiscovered competences in the organization and what people cared about. The reflection on the experience helped the participants realize that (a) they needed to maintain their status as a foundation in the public interest, and (b) they could expand their range of activities to include various kinds of "slow service" to members of the local community (such as accompanying senior citizens on errands). The emphasis of such slow service is on satisfying un-met needs for personal attention rather than on using time efficiently. The participants reported that they appreciated how the artist energized the process and helped them discover new ways of seeing their situation from which they could develop new responses. The managers felt that they had achieved greater clarity and a greater set of realistic ideas to take forward with the support of employees than they had imagined possible at the outset.

2.5. Assessing the values added with artistic interventions

The past few years have seen numerous attempts to evaluate the values added with artistic interventions. There is an interesting tension regarding impact evaluation in this field: whereas policymakers and managers who have not worked with artistic interventions seek evidence in terms of traditional business indicators, managers who have hosted such interventions in their organizations say that such measures are not useful for them for two reasons: (a) they note that the complexity of modern organizations and the multiplicity of concurrent changes and activities

makes the attribution of a change to a single factor unrealistic; (b) they prefer to rely on their own observations of people and processes and the feedback they hear from others inside and outside the organizations as indicators of values added with unconventional initiatives like artistic interventions (Berthoin Antal & Strauß, 2016: 47). Some scholars have sought to apply business criteria (e.g., Schiuma & Carlucci, 2016); others have tried instead to elicit criteria from the diverse stakeholders involved (e.g., Berthoin Antal & Strauß, 2016; Berthoin Antal & Nussbaum Bitran, 2015). Studies have documented many kinds of possible benefits at the personal, interpersonal, and organizational level, as well as some that extend to other actors in society. The generation of value for the organization depends first on individuals experiencing value from the artistic intervention.

A meta-analysis of empirical studies on artistic interventions identified a wide range of values-added (Berthoin Antal & Strauß 2016). The most frequently cited impact is seeing more and differently (2016: 42). At the interpersonal level, artistic interventions have been found to affect–usually positively–relationships among colleagues, often increasing the quantity and quality of communication and stimulating collaborative ways of working (2016: 44-45). Organizational level effects that result from the combination of individually and collectively experienced benefits lie primarily in "activation", which supports organizational development and improves the working climate. Organizational level effects on innovation are also documented in the meta-analysis. However, Raviola and Schnugg (2016) warn against attempts to commodify creativity with artistic intervention.

To our knowledge no artistic interventions have been organized specifically in order to enable employees to experience meaningful work. However, managers and participating employees often mention that the side-effects of the artistic intervention experience are at least as

important as those the intervention was intended to address. Therefore, it is worth examining a set of cases to see whether such interventions entail dimensions of meaningful work, and if so, which ones.

2.6. Conditions favoring or impeding the generation of value with artistic interventions

Among the conditions that are conducive to artistic interventions adding value at the individual and organizational level are: the willingness of employees to engage in learning with the artists and the support of management throughout the process. Employees often start quite skeptically, because before meeting with the artist they do not see a direct connection between their work and the arts, and they are concerned about how the time spent with the artist will affect their normal workload, but then report how surprisingly quickly artists can overcome the skepticism and gain the trust of employees to experiment with new approaches. A key condition that artists create with the participants during an artistic intervention is an "interspace" in which the norms and routines of the organization are temporarily suspended, opening the possibility of thinking and behaving differently (Berthoin Antal & Strauß, 2016). A barrier to benefitting from the experience often lies in lack of leadership interest in the artistic intervention. This lack of interest can be a problem from the beginning of the project, making it difficult for employees to see the purpose or to find the time for it; and it can appear at the end if there is no leadership support for following up on the ideas generated in the interspace with the artist.

Unsurprisingly for a relatively young research field, the theoretical underpinnings of artistic interventions are underdeveloped. Most studies emphasize the need for rich description rather than starting with theoretical preconceptions (Styhre & Fröberg, 2016). In light of the fact that managers and employees who feel they have had a valuable experience with an artistic intervention reject both an instrumental relationship with the arts as well as conventional

management indicators for evaluating the initiative's impacts in the organization (such as reduced absenteeism and increased productivity), it is necessary to explore alternative and open ways of theorizing about the value that artistic interventions can generate in organizations. Theories relating to meaningful work appear particularly apt in this context because they, too, reject a purely rational and instrumental view of management and offer different ways of conceiving of work. By using the theoretical lens of meaningful work to examine experiences with artistic interventions, we aim to make two kinds of theoretical contributions: (a) to a theory-based conceptualization of dimensions to assess the value artistic interventions generate, and (b) to the development of theories relating to meaningful work, because to date these have focused almost exclusively on the individual and have paid scant attention to the organizational choices that can help employees give meaning to their work.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

The current paper draws on data collected in a large study on artistic interventions throughout Europe. The data collection process started in 2011 and continued to the point of saturation in December 2014, when we found that the additional information was becoming redundant (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). The database contains responses to our Web-based pre- and post-experience surveys from the participating artists, the employees, and the managers responsible for the artistic intervention (also called 'project owners') because the overall research project takes a multi-stakeholder perspective. For this article we only use the data from responses by employees to the post-experience surveys conducted Spain, where the majority of our cases are located (Berthoin Antal & Nussbaum Bitran, 2015).

These artistic interventions were produced by an intermediary organization, Conexiones Improbables, which offers long interventions lasting 6-9 months, and short interventions lasting 2-4 months. In both models, the intermediary actively seeks out organizations that could be interested in such an innovative approach and helps the manager to formulate an organizational issue to address in the artistic intervention. It then finds artists to work with the organization. The decision about which employees will participate is made within each organization either on a volunteer basis or selected by management on the basis of relevance for the focal issue. The intermediary introduces its overall methodology to the participants, then each artist decides with the management and participating employees when they will meet and how they will work together (usually 4 sessions in the short interventions). At the end of the period, the intermediary organizes another session for all the participants to share what they learned from the artistic intervention.

The intermediary gave us access for the research because it needed an independent evaluation of its activities to show to the European and local funding agencies that supported its artistic interventions. A few weeks after each artistic intervention, the intermediary distributed the survey links to the project manager in each organization, who, in turn sent the links to the participating employees. Participation in the study was voluntary. Only the researchers had access to the data, and the respondents were promised anonymity. Given the small size of many of the organizations, guaranteeing anonymity entailed not asking questions that could identify the individual respondents (e.g., names or job title).

3.2. Research sample

The 67 employees who responded to the post-experience surveys come from 33 mostly small and medium-sized organizations. Just over half the organizations in the sample are in the

private sector, in various kinds of services (including IT and retail) and manufacturing; some are in the public sector (local authorities) and non-profit (education, health). For our study, the size and the sectors in which the organizations operated were not analytical variables, but their diversity offers an opportunity to identify the dimensions of meaningful work in different contexts.

The objectives of the artistic interventions in the sample included generating ideas for new products and services, finding new ways of relating to the organization's environment and re-thinking the organizational model. Unlike other organizations, in this Spanish sample personal development and skills training were not among the reasons cited by management for undertaking the artistic intervention. Therefore, to the extent that effects related to meaningful work might emerge from our data, they would be side-effects rather than intended objectives.

The open questions in the survey instrument asked the respondents to express in their own words how they had experienced the interaction with the artists, what they had appreciated, what they had found problematic, and what (if anything) they believed resulted for themselves and/or their organization. Using open questions permitted us to avoid the problem Morin (2008: 21) noted in her research, where her instrument using pre-existing scales had limited the responses to pre-existing categories and terminology determined by the researcher, thereby potentially excluding aspects of the experience that the respondents would want to add. The majority of employees formulated their responses in Spanish (which two of the authors understand); we obtained translations of the Basque responses into Spanish.

3.3. Data analysis

For the data analysis, one of the authors first selected the open questions in our survey that could be relevant for meaningful work, namely those relating to how the employees

perceived the interactions and how they assessed the experience and its effects on themselves and on the organization (see appendix A). The survey questions relating to the practical aspects of implementing artistic interventions were excluded from this analysis. This author then imported the respondents' wording into the data analysis software NVivo to undertake a qualitative analysis of textual material and to obtain the automatic calculation of the statistical representativeness of themes or categories in the data set. She took the syntactical forms as a unit of meaning, coded them systematically according to the subcategories associated with meaningful work from our theoretical framework. When a syntactical form referred to multiple subcategories, she assigned it a code for each relevant category. She composed new categories for material that fell outside the initial categories. When the diversity of expressions was rich she organized the material in a subcategory into lexical fields (see italicized subheadings in Tables 2, 3, and 4). In order to maximize the objectivity of the categorization, all three authors discussed the outcome of the preliminary categorization generated by the author who worked with the NVivo software. This approach permitted us to follow the recommendations for a systematic qualitative data analysis (Miles & Huberman 1994: 56) to identify the recurring ideas in the responses.

In the following section we present our data, including the percentages indicating the recurrence of each sub-category. This presentation documents the extent to which artistic interventions offer opportunities for experiencing meaningful work and which additional sub-categories emerge beyond those identified in the literature to date.

4. Results

The first thing that struck us in the data was the overwhelmingly positive tone of the responses to the experience. This outcome was not necessarily to be expected because the open questions and

the anonymous format of the instrument permitted respondents to formulate their thoughts and feelings freely, so they could have used the opportunity to vent frustrations. The second striking outcome is that the data analysis of the post-experience responses from the employees generates evidence in all three meta-dimensions associated with the non-instrumental approaches to meaningful work: personal development, relationships and service to others, and benefit for society. The coding with NVivo permitted the classification of 72.6% of the responses with these meta-dimensions, indicating that experience with artistic interventions are indeed associated with them. Thirdly, the data proved to be even richer than we expected because they contain additional aspects relating to meaningful work beyond those specified in the sub-categories derived from the literature. These additional and unexpected sub-categories show how artistic interventions can add value in organizations with respect to the experience of meaningful work.

The greatest number and variety of responses refer to experiencing personal development at work (A= 62.1% of the coded data), while relationships and service to others and benefit for society represent (B=28.9%) and (C=9.1%) of the coded data respectively. Rather than seeking to measure and compare each dimension of meaningful work, our qualitative-quantitative analysis permits us to show the representativeness of the existing subcategories and to reveal some that have not yet been documented. Given that the artistic interventions in the participating organizations were introduced to address internal matters, the much lower presence of data in the third category was to be expected; in fact it is almost surprising that we have documentation in this category at all. We present the results for each of these dimensions below.

4.1. Personal development

Unlike many other artistic interventions in organizations, those in our study were not designed as skill development workshops, so it is interesting to see how significant the dimension of personal

development is in our data. The rich expressions found in the responses correspond to the subcategories of learning and development opportunities (A2=11.5%), and autonomy (A3=19.2%), then marginally for recognition (A4=0.1%) and moral correctness (A1=0.8%) (See Table 2). Furthermore, other aspects relating to personal development appear implicitly in new subcategories that emerged from our data, discussed below.

[Insert Table 2]

The analysis of the lexical fields referring to learning and development opportunities reveals the positive impacts the respondents reported experiencing in the artistic interventions. They refer to joy, vitality, renewed motivation and engagement: "for me it is like an injection of optimism", "it helped us look forward to going back to work", "the artists generated an increase in motivation for me". The experience appears to help employees learn how to manage their stress and deal with their fears: "I learned not to control everything meticulously and to accept the unexpected", "to let go of, lose my fear of making mistakes". As a result of these experiences, the employees report being able to step back from their daily work and to rediscover its potential: "leave the routines that blind us and break the daily monotony to think and reflect about work", "to look at the dynamics of the day-to-day from a different perspective".

The responses coded into the subcategory of autonomy and referring to the use of skills and judgments to solve problems and make decisions evoke the notion of creativity associated with developing new practices and ways of thinking in order to resolve concrete problems: "it helped me to look for and apply creative solutions to concrete problems in the organization", "we will be able to introduce a different way of thinking in the organization to resolve problems and address new challenges".

In addition to the responses that we could code according to the existing categories from the literature, we found elements that provided new perspectives on meaningful work. The

analysis of the data brings to light a further subcategory that includes two dimensions: new ways of seeing self, and new ways of seeing work and the organization (labelled A5 and A6, Table 2).

The responses refer to the effects artistic interventions had on how the employees see themselves (A5=10.7%). Self-knowledge is a frequent theme: "makes me think about what I want and what I do not like, and where I would like to be in future", "it makes me realize that I am more creative than I thought and that I can do more things at work". These responses suggest that the artistic interventions had an indirect effect on people's self-image by stimulating them to work on themselves: "putting yourself in the other's place is also a process of critical self-reflection", "it helped me to improve myself". It also helped people gain confidence: "it helps me to dissipate the negative uncertainty and lack of confidence", "permit to learn from one's successes and especially from one's mistakes along the way."

The employees refer to changing the way they think about their work and about the organization itself (A6=19.8%). The data reveal changes in perspectives: "I realized that I can do more at work simply by seeing it from a different perspective", "I could open my horizons professionally as well as creatively", "it made me think in freer and more open ways about how to manage my own professional career and it gave me attainable goals to be able to achieve at my work". The employees note that the artistic intervention affected the way they see their organization: "it gave me a wider view of the company", "it helped us to reconsider many things, from a different form, a change of vision", "it stimulated a liberation from prejudices and stereotypes", "it is something different that opens ways of thinking and seeing the profession that you are developing".

4.2. Relationships and service to others

Accounting for 28.9% of the total coded items, " relationships and service to others" is the second most significant dimension. The subcategories relating to "interesting relationships" (B1) and "good relationships" based on cooperation and teamwork (B2) represent 5.1% and 7.3% of the total coded items respectively (Table 3).

[insert Table 3]

The employees emphasize that the artistic interventions permitted them to learn how to work with "people from different professions, countries and languages, with other very different kinds of people, from different departments", and to "be enriched" by the interaction. They also refer to a more positive working environment after artistic interventions because the experience enabled them to "break down barriers in relationships with others", to "develop relationships with employees we had never worked with before" as well as to "become closer to my colleagues; it improved the relationship between us".

Three additional dimensions–conflict resolution; discovery of potential in others; community spirit (labelled B3, B4, B5, Table 3)–associated with the metadimension "relationships and service to others" emerged from our analysis of responses about the experience with artistic interventions that are not yet explicitly included in the literature on meaningful work. Employees seem to feel that the enhanced relational context offers the possibility of supporting reconciliation (B3=1.9%) because they are more "conscious of one's capacity to resolve conflicts, to feel like a conciliatory and cohesive agent among my colleagues", and simply because "the better we know our colleagues the fewer imponderables we will have to face". Respondents also write about how their relationships were improved, enriched, nourished by a

greater propensity for discovering the potential in others (B4=9.6%): "knowing what other colleagues are capable of", "relating to colleagues in a different context and getting to know them better" and "discovering the skills and competencies of other colleagues". Some respondents refer to artistic interventions as enabling them "to discover the hidden potential of the human team". They also mention the sense of belonging to a larger community (B5=4.9%), by using terms like "unity" and "communion with other people in the organization" which favor an "increase in everyone's motivation to work on the project".

4.3. Benefit for society

The theme of adding value for society (C=9.1%) tends to appear in connection with the subcategory in personal development of seeing things from different perspectives. Although the objective of most artistic interventions is to focus on issues within the organization, 2.5% of the coded data refer to social purpose (C1) (See Table 4). The terms the respondents used refer to becoming aware of a need to take action in a pragmatic way to improve conditions for others, for example by "offering services" and "applying ideas in practice".

[Insert Table 4]

Under the meta-category of benefit for society, too, we found responses that went beyond the subcategories in our theoretical framework, so we introduced a new one, which we characterize as "stakeholder orientation". The respondents make numerous references to gaining a better understanding of the expectations of clients and users, or in some cases the patients they serve (C2=6.6%). The employees report becoming aware of the importance of "seeing how our clients can see us from the outside", "moving from assuming that the way of seeing the business and its environment is something given and unchangeable to recognizing that it is possible and

even necessary to work on and reflect on", and gaining an "expanded vision of the company". Such comments about the stakeholders are often connected to the wider social purpose of the organization: "a different way of getting to know our clients by making them participants in defining what the organization can offer", "it became evident that we needed to include the patient in thinking about how to improve the service we offer".

5. Conclusion

The analysis of our data responds affirmatively to our two-fold initial research question. It provides evidence that artistic interventions can enable employees to experience meaningful work; and by participating in an artistic intervention employees can meet the three kinds of needs specified in our framework, even if these needs are not specified as objectives by management at the outset. Our analysis contributes to theory-building in two ways: (1) it offers theoretically-based conceptualizations of the kind of value that artistic interventions can add to organizations beyond the mainstream business indicators that experienced managers consider unsatisfactory; (2) it advances theory development on meaningful work by constructing an integrated framework from several hitherto separate strands of literature and showing the value of a new integrated framework that includes subcategories not yet identified in the literature. Furthermore, a methodological contribution of this study is to show the comparative advantage of using open questions to assess employees' experiences of meaningful work and of providing them an opportunity to engage in reflection. Without priming the respondents to indicate support for existing categories, the open questions elicited evidence enriching findings from earlier studies that used scaled instruments of measurement, and this approach permitted the generation of additional subcategories to characterize meaningful work.

5.1. Implications for the theoretical lens of meaningful work

Artistic interventions can enable employees to experience meaningful work by giving them the opportunity to look at themselves, at their work and at their work context differently. While doing something different together, they discover qualities in other people that enrich their relationships at work. These processes highlight for them that work is not just a means for meeting individual and organizational economic needs, it is a context in which people can develop personal skills and positive relationships, while participating in a project that contributes something of value for society.

Our analysis enriches theory-building on meaningful work by providing more complex characterizations of each dimension than the theoretical framework offered at the outset.

(a) Personal development is more than a matter of experiencing autonomy, creativity, accomplishment and developing competencies; it entails a deeper change of the way people conceive of themselves, their work and the organization.

(b) Relationships and service to others go beyond working in a team, helping colleagues and serving customers; they encompass resolving conflicts, knowing the other and engaging in a community dynamic.

(c) Aspiring to contribute something of value to society is not just a wish to be useful, and it is more than a matter of meeting objectives efficiently; instead it is about gaining a deeper understanding of the human aspirations of external stakeholders.

5.2. Implications for the conceptualization of artistic interventions

Our research offers a new theoretical angle for framing and understanding the phenomenon of artistic interventions. We show that artistic interventions offer alternative methods for responding to organizational challenges in ways that can contribute to creating a

context for enabling employees to experience meaningful work. They may raise awareness of the multiple facets of meaningful work that tend to be masked, underestimated or neglected in the organization.

Furthermore, this research suggests a new definition for "success" in artistic interventions, a definition that is rooted in a larger body of theory rather than limited to the traditional narrow management definition that considers work as just a means to meet the economic needs of the employees and the organization. As Gardner et al. (2001) point out in introducing the concept of "good work", this activity allows individuals to enter into human relationships, to develop and to express themselves, as well as to participate in a project that contributes to society. We propose that a successful artistic intervention is one that

- Enables individuals to express and develop themselves in ways they consider meaningful;
- Contributes to enriching relationships at work and service to others; and
- Expands the organization's potential for contributing usefully to society.

Such a definition could be used by practitioners to guide and assess their work. Researchers interested in evaluating artistic interventions could also apply the criteria in this definition to formulate testable hypotheses.

5.3. Implications for practice

A manager who would conclude from this research that his or her task is to organize artistic interventions to make work meaningful for the employees would soon be disappointed. There is a striking absence in our data: the words "instrumental" and "management" do not appear. The employees did not learn something they were instructed to learn, but rather engaged in a process of discovery that was enabled because management invited an artist into the organization. The

managers who initiated the artistic intervention gave the employees and the artist the space to experiment in fresh ways to address an organizational challenge. The presence of the artist offered employees the possibility of working differently by suspending the organization's implicit and explicit rules about who says and does what, when, why, and how.

We alert managers to the risk we see in the field of artistic interventions, namely the search for a way to instrumentalize the arts and artists. The risk runs deeper than trying to find a more efficient means of using employees to generate profit; it can entail instrumentalizing artistic interventions to produce the illusion of a dialogue while actually camouflaging dysfunctionalities and conflicts in the organization (Clark & Mangham, 2004). Just as Sherry, McGrath and Levy (1993) addressed the risk of the dark side of giving, and Lips-Wiersma et al. (2009) theorized the dark side of spirituality in organizations, future studies are needed on the dark side of artistic interventions.

One way to avoid the risk of instrumentalization is to conceive artistic interventions in organizations as potential triggers for encouraging "positive deviance," defined as "intentional behaviors that depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways" (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004, p. 832). Mainemelis (2010) as well as Acharya and Taylor (2012) introduce the notions of "creative deviance" and "innovative deviance" to underscore that deviance is a core feature of innovation (see also Applebaum, Laconi & Matousek, 2007; Melnyk & Davidson, 2009). Artistic interventions offer a favorable setting for creative deviance because they open a temporary interspace for experimentation in which employees experience possibilities that they can then decide to try out in the normal organizational context.

Can managers learn from the evidence offered by the artistic intervention that employees are capable of and willing to pursue meaningful work on a daily basis? The answer does not lie in "managing" positive deviance to ensure meaningful work in the organization. Nor is it a matter of

eliminating rules or tensions entirely, because, as Mainemelis has emphasized, structural strain is a desirable condition and creative deviance is a normal, expected human response (2010: 564). Rather management's role is to encourage learning from experiences of positive deviance, for example by engaging in it themselves and by showing an interest in employees' activities in this direction.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

A limitation of this study is that it addresses the subjective dimensions of meaningful work more than its objective dimensions (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Future studies could shift the focus and bring to the fore the objective features of work and the workplace. Such additional research could serve as a basis for identifying the conditions present in artistic interventions that could favor the capacity of employees to give meaning to their work by addressing the intrinsic qualities of that work.

Future studies could also extend the research that we have undertaken by designing research instruments to collect fresh data in different contexts. Large organizations, for example, are underrepresented in our sample, although they have been among the pioneers of experimenting with artistic interventions. For example Darsø (2004) wrote about the experiences in the multinational company Unilever and Weller (2009) studied a program in the large German drugstore retail chain, dm-drogerie. In such organizations it would be easier to collect data on the respondents without violating anonymity provisions (e.g., about their tasks and work conditions) than in the small and medium-sized organizations that dominated our sample.

Another limitation of this study is the time frame within which the effects are traced. The data were collected several weeks after the experience so we cannot report on longer lasting effects. The study Bessière (2013) conducted in Eurogroup Consulting several years after the end

of an artistic residency program still found traces of effects identified by an earlier study (Berthoin Antal 2011, 2016) during the program and six months after it closed. The effects were kept alive by the artworks that continued to spark conversations in the organization. But little is known about how long effects last when the artistic intervention does not involve the creation of artworks that remain as visible reminders in the organization. Longitudinal studies are therefore needed to track how long the effects of experiencing meaningful work are retained in the organization; they should also examine the organizational and managerial options that would enable employees to continue to experience meaningful work after the artist has left the organization. Lastly, in the interest of extending non-instrumental management approaches, such studies could help deepen the understanding of how these experiences can improve the working climate and enable greater creativity in organizations. Such research would be needed in order to specify the necessary conditions for maintaining a virtuous cycle in which employees continue to experience meaningful work and to reflect on their work, their relations to others and the benefit to society.

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Appendix A

Themes and survey questions used in N'Vivo analysis

Themes	Survey questions
Overall importance of the artistic intervention for the employees' work	• How relevant was the project with the artist for your work? Please explain.
Effect of the interaction between artists and employees	• Do you feel that the interaction between employees and the artist had an impact: for you? If so, what kind of change? • Do you feel that the interaction between employees and the artist had an impact: for the other participants? If so, what signs give you this impression?
Potential effects on the organization	• What kind of benefits do you think your organization gained from participating in XLab[1]/Conexiones Improbables? Could you please give some specific examples of the points mentioned above? • Any other benefits for the company from participating in XLab/Conexiones Improbables?
Personal and professional effects	• What kind of benefits do you feel you gained personally from this project? • If you developed new skills, please tell us which they are. • If you developed your networks, please specify here. • Other advantages you experienced personally? (Please specify) • Overall, what was the most valuable aspect of your participation in XLab/Conexiones Improbables? • Did something happen in the interaction with the artist that surprised you? • Would you recommend to other people that they participate in this kind of interaction? If so, why? • Can you tell us an idea, possibility feeling, discovery, or anything else that you gained from this interaction that you feel is important for you personally and/or professionally? • Is there anything else that you think we should know about this experience?

[1] XLab: Each series of short artistic interventions has a different Lab name; for this table we replaced the name with X.

Table 1
Relevant dimensions of meaningful work for our data analysis

Meta-dimensions of meaningful work (Frémeaux & Michelson, 2011; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Isaksen, 2000)		**Sub-categories of meaningful work** (Morin 2008)
A. Personal development	Moral correctness	A1. Work performed in a workplace that values justice and equity, respects human dignity
	Learning and development opportunities	A2. Work that people enjoy doing, permits them to achieve their objectives, developing their competences and talents and realizing their aspirations and ambitions
	Autonomy	A3. Work that allows people to assume responsibilities, exercise judgment to solve problems, and taking initiatives in order to improve results
	Recognition	A4. Work that corresponds to people's skills and in which competences and results are recognized (including satisfactory salary and outlook for promotion)
B. Relationships and service to others	Positive relationships	B1. Work that enables interesting relationships
		B2. Work that enables good relationships
C. Benefit for society	Social purpose	C1. Doing something useful for others and for society

Table 2
Syntactical forms related to the metadimension "Personal development" for meaningful work

	PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	**% of the coded data**
Sub-categories from literature	**Lexical fields and examples of syntactical forms**	**62.1 %**
A1 - Moral correctness	*Humanism, ethics* Seeing the importance of humanizing [the work spaces] / Paying attention to and looking at how people see us from outside [of the sector], at the image that we have	0,8 %
A2 - Learning and development opportunities	*Joy, vitality, enthusiasm, motivation* Looking forward to going to work / Reigniting dreams / Engaging oneself / Increasing motivation / Having benefit from this injection of optimism *Fun* Allowing increase in fun and increase in results / Doing serious things with fun methods *Dealing with stress and fears* Learning not to control everything meticulously / Accepting the unexpected / No longer fearing making a mistake / Helping to dissipate the negative uncertainty and lack of confidence *Re-enchanting daily life at work* Interrupting routines / Breaking out of the daily monotony to think and reflect on work/ Catching new and disruptive ideas / Trying out something different / Seeing the daily dynamic from a different perspective / Breaking established molds	11,5 %
A3- Autonomy	*Renewing thought processes, creativity* Learning new daily way of proceeding, seeing, analyzing, developing / Learning new methodologies / Being more open to new ideas and opinions / Seeing other ways of focusing a project / Giving impulses / Stimulating one's creativity and innovative actions / Working in a way that expresses opinions, feelings, imagination / Developing one's visual thinking	19,2 %
A4- Recognition	*Individual recognition* Taking employees into account more / Recognizing what they know how to do	0,1 %
Sub-categories from our data		
A5 – New ways of seeing oneself	*Self-knowledge* Making me think about what we want and what we do not want / Learning to see what we like and what we do not like about ourselves / Recognizing that we are more creative than we think / Discovering that we can do more things in our work / Being able to bring in our own ideas *Work on oneself* Helping to improve oneself / Engaging in a process of self-criticism *Self-confidence* Having more self-assurance and confidence in one's work / Learning from one's achievements and mistakes / Learning to overcome moments of doubt and uncertainty / Not being blocked by biases or stereotypes / Increasing the feeling of reaffirmation, of confidence	10,7 %
A6 – New ways of seeing work and the organization	*Change of individual perspective* Thinking about one's work from a different perspective / Changing and trying to work with other ways of seeing things / Opening one's horizon about work and creativity / Thinking in more free and open ways about one's own professional career / Being able to achieve things at work *Change of organizational perspective* Getting an expanded vision of the company / Helping to see many things differently / Conceiving a situation in a different way / Developing a different way of thinking and of seeing the profession / Analyzing the organization from an external point of view	19,8 %

Table 3
Syntactical forms related to the metadimension "relationships and service to others" for meaningful work

	POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS	**% of coded data**
Sub-categories from literature	**Lexical fields and examples of syntactical forms**	**28.9 %**
B1 – Work that enables interesting relationships	*Expansion of interpersonal contacts* Learning to work in alliances with people from different professions, countries or languages / with other agents / Enriching oneself / Interacting with new groups / with different types of professions /with people from other sectors / with people in different departments	5,1 %
B2 – Work that enables good relationships	*Atmosphere at work and collaborative spirit* Improving the relationships and communication with colleagues / among ourselves / with other departments / Increasing motivation, engagement, involvement of colleagues / Favoring cohesion among members of the team / Creating better atmosphere at work / Stimulating team work and collaborative spirit /	7.3 %
Sub-categories of our data		
B3 – Conflict resolution	*Capacity for reconciliation* Discovering a new way of addressing conflicts / Being aware of one's capacity for resolving conflicts / Feeling like a person who can reconcile and unite its colleagues / Improving our knowledge of our colleagues and being ready to deal with the challenges on our journey	1.9 %
B4 – Discovering potential in others	*Curiosity and interest in others* Knowing the competences of other colleagues / Relating to colleagues and know them better / Discovering competences and abilities of colleagues / Sharing the richness of drawing on different kinds of knowledge / Discovering hidden potential in the human team	9.6 %
B5 – Community spirit	*Collective belonging* Improving cohesion among members of the team / with the work team / Developing the sense of unity / communion with other people in the organization	4.9 %

Table 4
Syntactical forms related to the metadimension "Benefit for society" for meaningful work

	SOCIAL PURPOSE	% of coded data
Sub-categories from literature	**Lexical fields and examples of syntactical forms**	**9.1 %**
C1 – Doing something useful for others and for society	*Action, pragmatism* Cementing and putting into practice the ideas and possibilities that we had thought about already / Planning to offer services that do not yet exist / Intervening in the physical space as human life space / Obliging one to take a fresh look and undertake new interventions in the public space	2,5 %
Sub-categories of our data		
C2 – Better understanding of expectations of clients, patients and users	*Recognition and integration of stakeholders* Learning how to increase the sense of well-being [of the children and families in the hospital] / Understanding how to generate new strategies that stimulate the patient and improve his development / Learning other way of getting to know clients by making them participants in defining what the organization can offer/ New way of understanding relations between users, and between them and the center/ Developing the interaction with all kinds of users / Recognizing the importance that humanization and well-being have in the spaces [for patients and families]	6.6 %